

## HISTORY

The Burlingame Subdivision, "*The Tract of Character*", originally constructed in 1912, is an important example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century experimental approach to real estate development utilizing a "team of specialists" to develop, market, and construct exclusive development. Its developers, McFadden and Buxton, were extremely active in local real estate development during this time. Architectural control was maintained through the use of a subdivision team headed by consulting architect, William H. Wheeler, and by inclusion of restrictive building covenants. Later on, these controls would be enforced through the watchdog efforts of the Burlingame Club, allegedly the earliest and oldest neighborhood organization in San Diego.

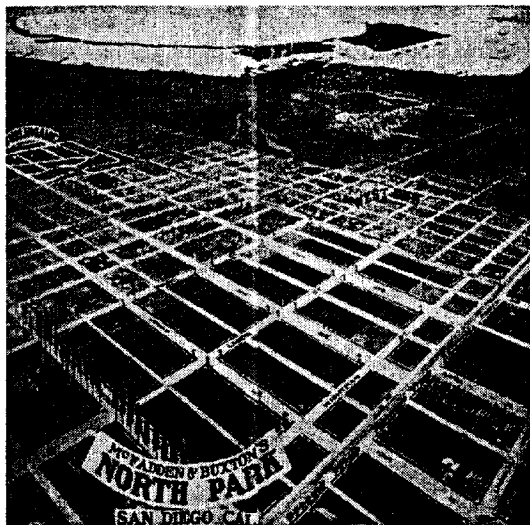
The Burlingame Club, still active today, was formed in October 1913 as a civic organization specifically chartered to beautify and protect the neighborhood. Beyond supervising the planting of palm trees along the streets, the Club was and is a philanthropic organization with members donating to needy citizens as well as caring for the elderly and infirm in the City of San Diego. A Community Service Committee was also created to assist people in need. Projects undertaken under these auspices include: making and/or buying needed equipment to be given to hospitals and children with disabilities; donating regularly to the Shoe Fund; donating to battered women's groups; and assisting in World War I and II.

Located within the tract is an eclectic mix with more than 170 unique and interesting houses, each representative example of suburban single family architecture spanning the period between the pre-World War I and the early post-World War II years (1912-1952). Besides William Wheeler's contribution to the overall architectural flavor of the tract, there are many examples of works done by several noted master architects and home builders including: Carlton Winslow, Walter Keller, Earl Josef Brenk, Alexander Scheiber, Charles Salyers, Charles Swift, Harry Farr, Pear Pearson, Archibald McCorkle and others. Many of these architect designed homes were built for San Diego's leading citizens at the time: Percy Benbough, Mary Fulford, Dr. Harry Wegeforth, Dr. Clair Sealy and Simon Switzer.

Important to the growth of this area in the early part of this century were the City's efforts to foster the area's development through the expansion of electric streetcar lines from the inner city out into its suburbs. Throughout the United States at this time, the new technology of the street railway, coupled with the advances in sanitary engineering methods, enabled families to move out from the old inner city boundaries into near vacant and lightly settled land. In this new land the Jeffersonian rural ideal, with its emphasis on private family life and the security of a small community setting amid aesthetically pleasing natural surroundings, encouraged middle-class Americans to build a wholly new residential environment, the streetcar suburb.



The years 1881-1900 saw an increase in intra-urban rail mileage in San Diego. A number of privately owned horse-drawn, cable-driven and electric-operated streetcar lines expanded out from downtown San Diego into outlying areas. Distinct suburban neighborhoods developed at the terminus of these electric rail lines. By the 1890's, the City of San Diego began to look like a typical eastern or mid-western American city, complete with a downtown commercial district, a busy waterfront area and swanky suburban neighborhoods: Sherman Heights, Grant Hill, Golden Hill, Florence Heights, and University Heights to name a few. Much of this suburban growth was along newly-laid streetcar lines, which were usually organized by the real estate syndicates, which were currently involved in developing these subdivisions. Initially, these streetcar lines served to attract prospective property owners to the newly laid-out subdivisions where lots would be auctioned off. They would later serve as quick, reliable transportation to the heart of the city from these subdivisions. However, most of the real estate developers were more concerned with selling land than operating streetcar lines.



By 1891, several failing rail lines were absorbed or bought out by the San Diego Electric Railway Company. The consolidation of the system allowed the use of single fare with free transfer points to other lines. Under the directorship of self-proclaimed "capitalist" John D. Spreckels, it had embarked upon a policy of expansion out into the suburbs. Following convention, much of this new trackage was built in conjunction with real estate development. Spreckels was a firm believer that, "transportation determines the flow of population". Spreckels, like his fellow streetcar directors nationwide, was convinced that the key to profit lay in the proportional increase in the number of passengers that would be constantly increased as the streetcar system expanded into the suburbs. Spreckels did not wish to control the form and direction of suburban expansion, but rather to leave suburban development to real estate builders and individual homeowners who would buy building materials from his company and obtain building loans from the various banks whose boards he sat on. The success or failure of the streetcar system centered around attempts to provide housing for people, each with a small parcel on which to build a house, achieving what previously had been available only to a few rich families with large houses and ample land.

In response, real estate speculators purchased and subdivided parcels of land along the streetcar routes. Similar to subdivision development today, these developers installed the subdivision's infrastructure-water and sewer hook-ups, street lighting, curbs, sidewalks, paving, street trees, etc. While several local real estate developers built speculation houses on their tracts to boost sales, most of these developers were interested in selling lots, not homes. It was up to the individual lot buyer to contact either an architect or a craftsman/builder to design and construct the home.

Between 1906 and 1929, the City of San Diego experienced a tremendous amount of commercial and residential development. This growth was underwritten by the eventual acquisition of a steady supply of water and the concurrent development of the City's rail and harbor facilities. Additionally, the City staged a highly successful exposition in Balboa Park, between 1915-1916, extolling the area's climate, agricultural and water-borne resources. The Panama-California International Exposition, helped to create one of the greatest local building booms. The Exposition attracted thousands of visitors who chose to return to San Diego to live,

work, invest and retire. Because of the steady stream of new residents, local Realtors began to buy and subdivide several tracts of land neighboring the downtown area, particularly in the areas bordering the eastern boundaries of Balboa Park.

By 1909, the San Diego Electric Railway had absorbed the competing South Park & East Side Railway. Developed in 1906, the line run from Broadway and 25<sup>th</sup> Street to 30<sup>th</sup> and Cedar Streets and was responsible for stimulating residential growth in the South Park and Brooklyn Heights areas along the southeastern corner of Balboa Park. Renamed the Broadway-Brooklyn Heights Line, in 1909, tracks were extended north of Cedar Street, along 30<sup>th</sup> Street, to Juniper Street. A private right-of-way was purchased to make the jog at Ivy Street to Juniper Street. After a wooden trestle was built over Switzer Canyon, the line was extended up to Upas Street. By 1912, two sets of tracks had to be installed in order to meet the increased demand of ridership.

Real estate development paralleled the expansion of the streetcar. That same year, 1912, civil engineer A. P. McCarton completed his survey of Tract No. 1402 for real estate developers Joseph McFadden and George Buxton. Consisting of some forty acres within the northeastern quarter of Pueblo Lot No. 1138, it extended along Switzer Canyon to the north, the middle of the east/west alley along, and just north of, Juniper Street to the south, 32<sup>nd</sup> Street to the east, and the 30<sup>th</sup> Street streetcar tracks to the west. This was to become Burlingame.

McFadden and Buxton were particularly active in real estate development in the surrounding area. Besides developing Burlingame, they were also involved in the development of tracks within the West End Tract north of Upas Street, west of Ray Street and McFadden and Buxton's North Park, north of Dwight Street, east of Ray Street, both a short distance from the streetcar line along 30<sup>th</sup> Street which bisected the area.

Promotional literature for the opening day of the tract for public inspection identified it as the "Tract of Character". This was in reference to its physical qualities. Its location, high on the mesa overlooking Switzer Canyon, was advertised as being free of damp coastal fogs and afforded spectacular views of mountains and ocean. Its sidewalks and streets were laid out along the natural contours of the land. Additional character was given by the use of decomposed granite

street paving, cast iron street lamps with arc lights supplied by electricity from underground conduits, ornamental gates and in the canyon, a promised fully equipped children's playground.

While many of these features can no longer be found, one additional design feature still remains and contributes to the tract's uniqueness. The original planners, Joseph McFadden and George Buxton, demarcated the tract with rose colored sidewalks, the only such area in the City of San Diego to have them.



## BUILDING MAKES PROFITS

THE fact that you buy a lot in a tract, and others buy lots in the same tract will not in itself create an enhancement in values. Houses must be built and a settlement of people created. Every house constructed adds value to every lot in the tract. Our tracts are always well located, highly improved, and surrounded by rigid restrictions. As a consequence the growth is naturally rapid. But we do not stop there—we build, and build, and build. We are the "Never-Let-Up" firm. Our previous operations stand as a guarantee. The McFadden & Buxton system spells sure profits.

### THE MATCHLESS BURLINGAME

will grow faster and show quicker profits than any other property ever before offered in San Diego. \$60,000 is being spent to place Burlingame in a class by itself. At the opening prices, we are selling lots for less than adjacent property which lacks improvements and restrictions. The opening prices will be withdrawn on February 1st.

Our sales are at your service to show Burlingame. An appointment by telephone will result in a delightful ride through Balboa Park to Burlingame. Telephone Home 4453. Sunset Main 609.

**McFADDEN & BUXTON**  
CO-OWNERS AND GENERAL AGENTS

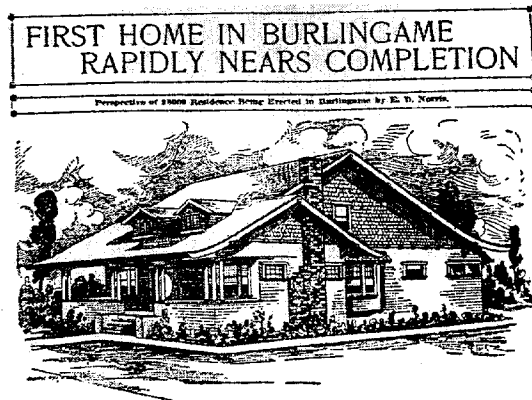
1109-11 D Street

Union Building



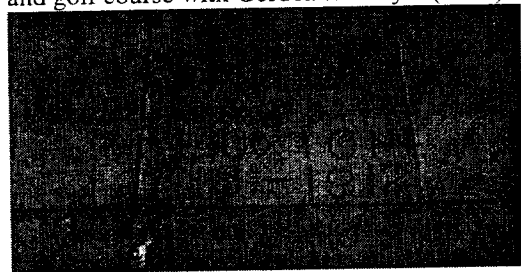
On Saturday, January 13, 1912, McFadden & Buxton opened the Burlingame tract for public inspection and an auction was held. Lots were offered, on the average, sixty feet wide by 100-180 feet in depth. Building restrictions required an eight-foot setback between the houses to ensure adequate spacing of the houses. On that first weekend alone, thirty-five lots, or twenty percent of the total amount of lots within the tract, were sold. One buyer, Mr. E.D. Norris, announced plans to construct his home at 3170 Maple Street immediately, allegedly the first completed in the tract. Construction began in earnest soon after. Approximately one year later, by January 1, 1913, thirty-five houses had been completed. Nine years later, in 1921, there were over forty-five houses.

Within this time period, Burlingame became a showcase for contemporary architectural fancy. Several well-known local architects and builders were contracted by property owners to design and build their homes for them. Among these architects were: William Wheeler, Charleton Winslow, Earl Brenk, Charles Salyers, Walter Keller, Theo Lohman, Alexander Schreiber, Archibald McCorkle and Louis Brandt.



Much of the early overall architectural flavor of the tract has to be attributed to William Henry Wheeler. Wheeler was the principal architect for McFadden and Buxton's "System Firm", which was incorporated in November of 1911. The company pioneered the concept of specialization rather than generalization of different work expertise. The company's "system" consisted of twenty-four employees who each commanded a specialty in some aspect of real estate investment and development. Included within the "system" were land developers, architects, builders, sales managers, investment brokers, and insurance underwriters. While the McFadden and Buxton Company existed for only two years, 1911-1913, it proved to be one of the most innovative and enterprising real estate development firms experimenting in the concept of modern housing tract development.

Wheeler, who had moved to San Diego in 1912 specifically to become the chief architect for McFadden & Buxton's company, was a native of Australia, where he had received his early training in architectural design. In 1893, at the age of twenty, he immigrated to Vancouver, British Columbia. Seven years later he moved to San Francisco where he studied engineering at the University of California Berkeley. After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, Wheeler relocated to Arizona in 1907, where he worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad as a building engineer in Arizona as well as the company's supervising architect for its operations in Mexico. After spending five years working for the Southern Pacific, Wheeler came to San Diego and immediately began working for McFadden & Buxton. Besides working on the Burlingame project, Wheeler was also involved in the company's development of East Burlingame, North Park, Rancho Los Palms and Hollywood Park. While working for McFadden & Buxton, Wheeler was developing his own private architectural practice in San Diego. Among his later commissions was the Angeles Temple in Echo Park for Aimee Semple McPherson (1922), the Balboa Theater (1924), Congregation Beth Israel (1826), the San Diego Athletic Club with F.W. Stevenson and I.E. Loveless (1927), All Saints Episcopal Church (1928) and the Agua Caliente Casino, hotel, pool and golf course with Gordon E. Mayer (1929).



Wheeler designed many of the earliest homes in the Burlingame tract. The Dr. Harry Wegeforth residence, 3004 Laurel Street, was designed by Wheeler for Dr. Wegeforth. Dr. Wegeforth would later become the principal founder of the San Diego Zoological Society and Zoo in 1916, and is credited with establishing one of the finest zoological and horticultural collections on the world. Dr. Wegeforth held the position of president of the Zoological Society from that time until his death in 1941. Dr. Wegeforth's residence is City of San Diego Historical Landmark No. 163, one of several residences in Burlingame designated as individual historical sites for its architectural style, being the work of a master architect (Wheeler) and association with a historical person (Dr. Wegeforth).



Another designated City of San Diego Historical Landmark No. 124, 125, 126, is a grouping of three redwood-clad, two story houses, arranged in horseshoe pattern, with their fronts opening onto a central lawn area facing San Marcos Avenue, and the rear overlooking the south rim of Switzer Canyon. These homes were built simultaneously in 1913 by Mary W. Fulford. She hired architect Carleton Monroe Winslow to design these eastern influenced Craftsman style homes on lots she had purchased in 1912. Winslow, who was an associate architect of Bertram Goodhue, chief architect for the upcoming 1915 Panama-California Exposition in Balboa Park, came to San Diego in 1911 from New York City to do preliminary work on the Exposition buildings. Mary W. Fulford, who was a cousin of the Exposition's president, George W. Marston, was probably introduced to Winslow by Marston. It has been surmised that Fulford was involved in speculative real estate building in time for the opening of the Exposition in 1915.



There are many other homes within Burlingame with unique histories. One on the south side of Kalmia Street is a row of nine homes with a similar pedigree. Among the first to be built in the area, they were commissioned by councilman and fire commissioner Percy Benbough. Benbough, who wanted to move his family away from the hustle and bustle of the streetcars and horseless carriages around his former home at

Sixth and Upas Streets, dreamed of the life of a country squire. When the Burlingame tract opened up for sale, he immediately swapped a property he owned in Imperial Valley for his nine parcels of land all contiguous to each other along Kalmia Street. Benbough proceeded to develop the properties and moved his entire family, including relatives and friends, into these houses. Benbough is reported to have built the house at 3147 Kalmia for himself, while the others were occupied by two of his sisters and their husbands; his brother Harry, who run a furniture store downtown; John Gillons, Percy's partner in a downtown clothing store; and several close friends. The Benbough House located at 3147 Kalmia has been designated City Historical Landmark No. 430 as an individual site, based on its association with Benbough, master architect William Wheeler and its unique avant-garde modern influenced architectural design. The Burlingame Historical District comprises a total of 189 properties. Of these, ten sites have been individually designated as City of San Diego Historical Landmarks.

Development slowed during the World War I period and less than ten houses were built during this time. After the end of the War, in the 1920's a large number of homes were constructed, these homes are mostly designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival architectural style popular of the period.

As a result of the 1929 market crash and the World War II years, a moderate number of homes were built in Burlingame during the 1930's and early 1940's. Development activity continued at a very slow pace after the post World War II years, up to the early 1950's when the last two houses of distinctive California Ranch architectural style were built in the "Tract of Character".

There are an additional 161 potential historical sites as either individually designatable or contributing sites within the proposed Historical District. These sites are identified in the Survey Map on the next page.